



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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The annual hunt for gypsy moths is underway in Washington!

OLYMPIA – The annual hunt for invading gypsy moths has begun. Between now and mid-July, employees from the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) will place 19,000 orange or green A-shaped cardboard gypsy moth traps in trees and shrubs throughout the state. The goal of the trapping program is to determine if any new infestations of gypsy moths have developed so that they can be eliminated.

Traps will be placed in all 39 counties. However, 95 percent of them will be placed in western Washington where most gypsy moths have been found in the past. Most traps will be placed at a density of one trap per square mile. Trapping will be more intense in areas where moths were caught last year and along waterways and in ports where moths are likely to arrive on ships. Columbia and Garfield counties will each get 10 traps. King County will get 3,400, Pierce County will get 2,400, and Lewis, Snohomish and Whatcom counties will each get more than 1,000.

Each trap contains a female scent that attracts male moths from up to a mile away. Once inside, the male can't get out. Beginning in mid-July, the traps will be checked every three weeks. If any moths are caught, more traps will be brought into the area to pinpoint the center of the infestation. After reviewing summer catch data and other evidence of gypsy moth activity found in each area, state entomologists will determine this fall whether to propose a treatment next spring to eliminate what they think is a reproducing population of the moth.

Last year, only 17 gypsy moths were caught, the lowest number in 23 years. As a result, this year, for the first time since 1988, WSDA conducted no gypsy moth treatments. This is only the fourth time since 1974, when the moth was first discovered in Washington, that no spraying has been necessary.

The gypsy moth is extremely destructive. During May and June when it exists as a caterpillar, the moth eats large amounts of leaves and can flourish on more than 500 species of trees and shrubs.

The gypsy moth has a wingspan of about 1.5 inches. The male is tan with brown markings. The female is white with brown markings and is larger than the male. The gypsy moth was first brought to the U.S. from France over 100 years ago. It escaped by accident and began its slow, steady advance across the continent. Once it becomes established, it is extremely resistant to eradication efforts. It is permanently established in 18 states in the East and upper Midwest where it causes millions of dollars in environmental and economic damage. The gypsy moth has been the subject of more eradication strategies than any forest insect in U.S. history.

For more information, call WSDA toll-free at (800) 443-6684 or visit the Web site at www.agr.wa.gov.